

1996 COLORADO WEATHER SUMMARY IN BRIEF

(Source: Colorado Climate Center, Colorado State University)

January - This was a month of storms, heavy snows, strong winds, and extreme temperatures. New records for total monthly snowfall were set at locations in the Northern and Central Mountains. Southwest Colorado received near normal snowfall after several very dry months. Southeast Colorado again missed the action and ended up with less than 50% of average. Extremely warm days with temperatures in the 60s and 70s were offset by many days with sub-zero readings. Wind gusts of 40 mph or higher were observed on 17 days at some locations in the Front Range foothills.

February - Three weeks of mild weather with lower-elevation daytime temperatures frequently in the 50s and 60s were sandwiched between blasts of arctic air early and late in the month. For the fifth month in a row, little or no precipitation fell east of the mountains. However, a 4-day onslaught of Pacific moisture brought heavy precipitation to western and central portions of the state accompanied by avalanches and mud.

March - This month brought typically changeable weather to the state. Eleven storm systems crossed the region during the month, but most brought only light precipitation. There were plenty of windy days, but no more than usual for this time of year. The storm that developed on March 13 produced some surprisingly heavy, wet snow for portions of eastern Colorado. In some areas, more precipitation fell than in all of the previous six months.

April - Like March, this month brought a little bit of everything to Colorado and a lot of wind. There were many opportunities for precipitation in April as several significant storms crossed the region. However, precipitation was light with most of the storms as they quickly crossed the state. Most of the state ended up drier than average. Exceptions were in Northwest Colorado which ended up a little wetter than average and a pair of wet spots in eastern Colorado which were hard hit by the April 13-14 snowstorm. Temperatures for the month ended up near or a little above average across the state, but the average was comprised of several very warm days and some cold ones.

May - The first three weeks of the month were much warmer than average over most of the state with little or no precipitation. The mountain snowpack melted quickly but produced little flooding. Many new record high temperatures were set in a mid-month heatwave. Several major wildfires burned out of control. Then a large slow moving storm brought a dramatic change. Several days of soaking rains along with cold temperatures and mountain snows replenished the soil moisture east of the mountains.

June - Warm summer weather prevailed throughout the month with none of the spring-like storms that sometime bring snow to the high mountains. As a result, June temperatures ended up a little above average statewide. Strong thunderstorms developed on several days over eastern areas with hail and a few tornadoes -- fairly typical for June. The most unusual feature of the month was the much-welcomed wetter than average conditions over southwest Colorado.

July - Thunderstorms were numerous and often severe during the month across much of eastern Colorado as relatively cool but surprisingly humid air repeatedly visited the High Plains. Several tornadoes were sighted, and damaging hail was widespread. A few heavy storms were also reported in western Colorado. Meanwhile, thunderstorm activity was weaker than normal in the mountains, and July temperatures were consistently warmer than average across the Western Slope. Several major forest fires raged in western Colorado. The only major heatwave on the Plains came early in the month.

August - Thunderstorms, some producing hail, rumbled over portions of the state on most days of the month as is typical for August. The majority, however, took aim on eastern Colorado. For the second month in a row, frequent and occasionally severe thunderstorms dropped heavy rain. Afternoon storms were surprisingly few over the mountains and western valleys. Temperatures remained quite hot, especially west of the mountains, with few large day-to-day changes. A heatwave August 12-13 sent temperatures close to the century mark both east and west of the mountains.

September - A month of stormy weather accompanied the transition from summer to fall in Colorado. Several large storms brought rapidly dropping temperatures, widespread precipitation, and mountain snows. The San Luis Valley and a small area in east central Colorado missed the brunt of the storms. Temperatures cycled through warm and cold periods about every seven days in September. Most of eastern Colorado received some snow and freezing temperatures by the end of the month. Grand Junction had a hard freeze on September 27, three weeks earlier than normal.

October - The first half of the month was dry and unseasonably warm as a large high pressure ridge dominated the West. An exception was one weak-looking storm system on the 2nd and 3rd that brought surprisingly heavy rainfall to southwest Colorado. Weather patterns then shifted, and the remainder of October saw frequent and fast-moving storm systems, heavy accumulations of mountain snow, periods of strong winds, and cold temperatures. The fast moving storms dropped very little moisture east of the mountains.

November - This month provided a wide variety of changeable weather conditions at lower elevations. Plenty of snow fell in nearly all of Colorado's mountain areas, but despite several opportunities, very little moisture fell on the Eastern Plains. For the month as a whole, temperatures ended up significantly below average in extreme eastern areas but one to three degrees above average over central and western areas.

December - The winds at mountain top levels were very strong over the state as the jet stream turned and shifted. Several fast-moving disturbances brought snows to the mountains every few days, but for the third month in a row, the Eastern Plains remained dry. A ferocious cold blast brought an unusual combination (for Colorado) of extreme cold and strong winds during the 16th through the 18th.